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Faith, Ethnicity, Place:

Young People's Everyday Geopolitics

in Scotland

Research report 2015

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Rowena Arshad



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

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Section 1: Summary of Key Points

Methodology: How we did the research

- We adopted a qualitative approach and conducted 45 focus groups and 224 interviews to access the social worlds of the young participants;
- 382 young people participated in the research, comprising 190 young women and 192 young men; and
- 100 young Muslims, 81 non-Muslim South Asians, 37 asylum seekers and refugees, 30 international students, 39 Central and Eastern European migrants, and 96 White Scottish young people participated in this study.

Politics and Participation

- Young people engaged in politics through various media platforms, but were not always clear on how to access politics and influence change. Their political engagement was often influenced by both parents and friends;
- Young people voiced mistrust of politicians and political parties, and recognised the policy differences between Scotland and Westminster;
- Although young people had low levels of membership of political parties, many were interested in issue-based politics (e.g. human rights); and
- Young people were politicised by the Independence Referendum and by the opening up of the vote to those aged 16 and 17.

National Identity and Scottishness

- The independence debate acted as a catalyst for young people to reflect on what it meant to them to be Scottish; many felt that Scotland was a 'fair society' that was 'diverse' and 'friendly';
- Young people affiliated themselves to Scotland and Scottishness, irrespective of their ethnic and religious heritage; however, experiences of racism in public spaces sometimes eroded this and made them feel excluded and alienated;
- Young people often pointed out that national identity is only one aspect of their identity, with faith, ethnicity and cultural heritage also being important. Many young people also reflected on their transnational and hybrid identities; and
- Young people talked about important locations that nurtured a sense of Scottishness, including urban areas and educational sites.

Interactions and Encounters

- Most young people were highly positive about diversity in Scotland and many engaged in inter-religious and multi-ethnic friendship groups at school and university;
- There was some evidence that specific religious and minority ethnic groups were more segregated than other young people. In Glasgow, young people tended to identify Slovakian, Romanian and Czech young people as the most isolated minority groups, and some participants felt that Muslim students were the most segregated at university; and
- There was evidence of sexism and homophobia amongst participants, as well as personal experiences of these forms of prejudice.

Migration and Mobility

- Young people's experiences of migration have led to multiple understandings of 'home';
- Language is a key barrier for migrant young people, including for their parent's generation;
- Migration heritages are important to young people's sense of identity and experience; and
- Many young people talked positively about immigration and supported pro-migration policies in Scotland, however they also recognise the negative impact of the media on immigration discourse, and have personal experience of 'securitisation'.

Racism and Discrimination

- Young people felt it is important to talk about racism and referred to racist incidences on the basis of accent, skin colour, faith, dress, nationality and ethnicity;
- Young people explained that racist incidents tended to be triggered by media stereotypes and people who were under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs;
- Young people understand that racism can be both covert and overt. Encountering and responding to racism was context-dependent, based on the intersection of place, community size, peer and intergenerational relations, and personal identities; and
- Many young people demonstrated resilience to everyday racism and felt able to manage and respond to it.

Being Mistaken for a Muslim

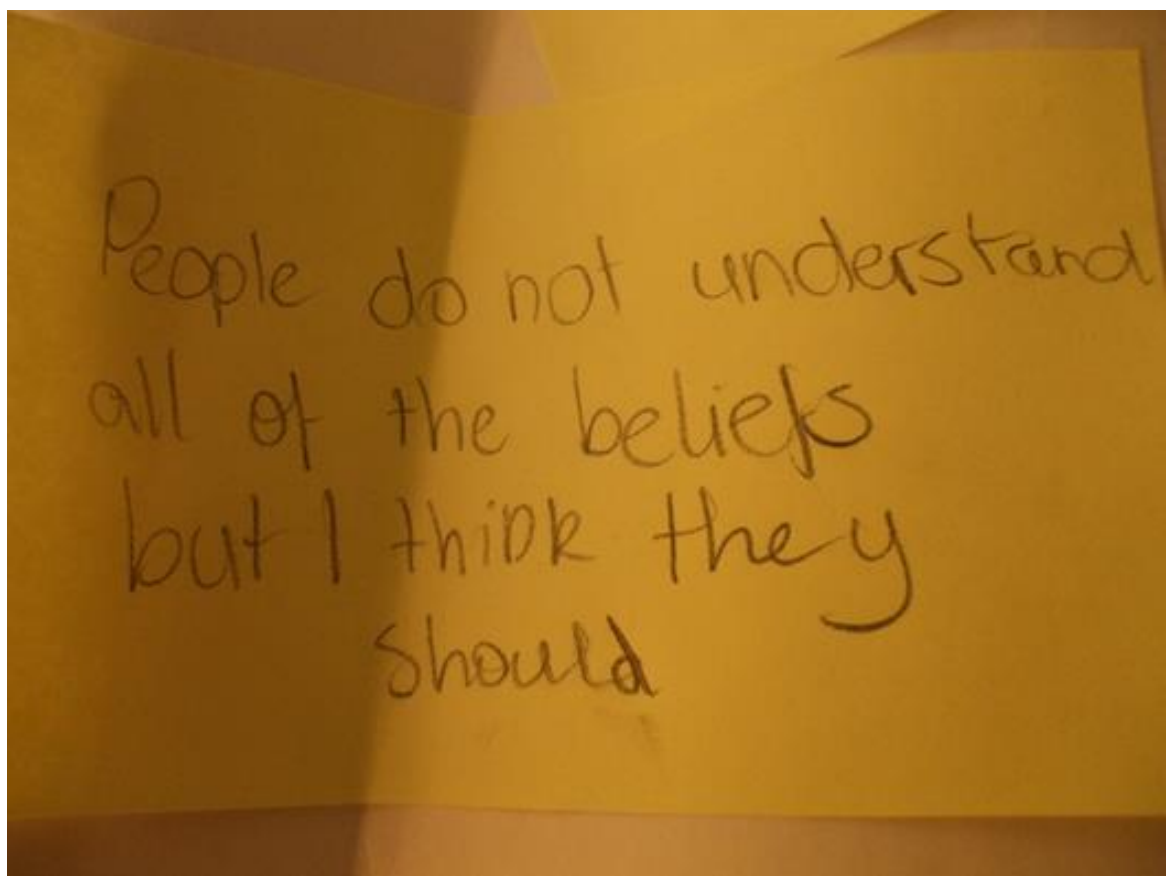
- Young people from non-Muslim South Asia, Africa, and some Central and Eastern European countries experienced being taken as Muslim;

- Young people with South Asian heritage were most commonly misrecognised as Muslim (Sikh, Hindu, non-religious Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi). They claimed this was the result of their skin colour, hair style and facial features, leading people to assume that they followed the Islamic faith;
- Young people explained that negative media representation, homogenisation of the 'Asian' community, the small size of some ethnic and religious minority communities and low levels of public awareness of religions were why they were sometimes mistaken for Muslims.

Islamophobia

- Young Muslims questioned the usefulness of the term 'Islamophobia'. The term is seen to be 'othering', reinforcing difference, which in turn further marginalises Muslims;
- Young people preferred the term 'racism' to 'Islamophobia'. The media, including social media, are catalysts of anti-Muslim sentiment; and
- If Islamophobia is defined narrowly as anti-Muslim sentiment, there are clear incidences of discrimination and prejudice against Muslims, which is often gendered and determined by where people live.

Section 2: Introduction



What is this research about? What were the aims of the research? This report explores young people's everyday lived experiences of place, politics and identity. We investigate the experiences of young people growing up in urban, suburban and rural Scotland, focussing on everyday geopolitics and patterns of Islamophobia among ethnic and religious minority young people.

Everyday geopolitics describes the way in which international, national and local issues (economic, political and social) shape, and are shaped by, people's everyday lives in different contexts. For ethnic and religious minority young people, this is a complex and multi-faceted issue. Connected to this, we are interested in exploring patterns of Islamophobia in Scotland. Although research has drawn attention to this phenomenon, there is on-going debate about what constitutes Islamophobia and how it influences the lives of young people from diverse ethnic and religious groups who might be mistaken for being Muslim, and how this relates to their feelings about those who identify with the Islamic faith. People in Scotland from ethnic and religious minority groups regularly experience racism, faith-based intolerance and other forms of social exclusion. Racism remains an issue for Scotland, as it does for the rest of the UK; however, there are significant aspects of the Scottish situation that differ. First, Scotland has its own distinct and unique history of migration and settlement, unlike that of the rest of the UK. Second, the diversity and distribution of ethnic and religious minority populations contrast with those in England. Furthermore, rarely is specific attention given to political or economic events in Scotland. Third, it would appear that Scotland has been successful in providing a context in which ethnic and religious minority groups who are perceived as different feel more accepted. It is therefore not possible simply to transplant existing ideas about racism and Islamophobia from elsewhere in the UK into the Scottish context. For these reasons, we conducted research about racism and Islamophobia with a specifically Scottish focus.

This project had four interrelated aims:

- To explore the issue of Islamophobia in relation to the experiences of young people in Scotland from different ethnic and religious backgrounds who are targeted because they 'look Muslim', and to explain how different religious, ethnic and minoritised youths experience and understand Islamophobia, and its impact on community relations, social cohesion and integration;
- To analyse these experiences within a framework that pays attention to the intersectionality of ethnicity with other identities, such as religion, gender, social class and locality;
- To detail how young people understand and negotiate everyday geopolitics; and

- To problematise polarised discourses that see young people as either politically disengaged and apathetic, or politically radicalised and extreme.

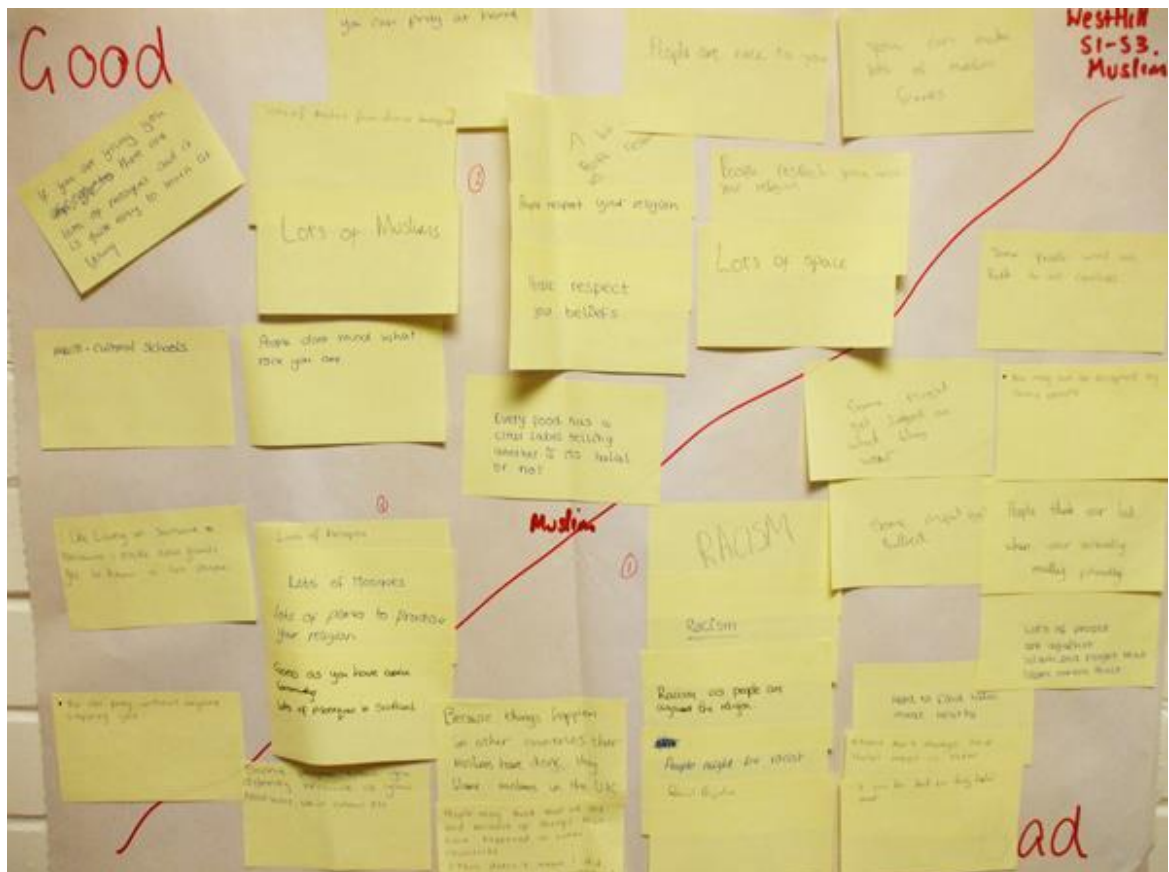
In addition, our broader aim was to explore the experiences of ethnic and religious minority young people in Scotland today.

This entailed exploring the following questions:

- In what ways do the urban, suburban or rural contexts influence young people's everyday lives and shape their experiences, understandings of and responses to Islamophobia?
- How do young people understand and engage with media representations of Muslims and minority ethnic people?
- In what ways are young people do negotiate, mediate and resist global, national, local and personal events?
- What are the particularities of Islamophobia for young people within the context of Scottish nationalism and multiculturalism?
- How do young people engage in politics?
- What policy changes could be made to improve community relations in Scotland and the wider UK?

In this report we present our key findings about the experiences of young people growing up in Scotland who are from different ethnic and religious minority groups. We outline how we undertook this research before we explore the key findings.

Section 3: Methodology: How we did the research



How was this research conducted? What methods were used? Where did the research take place and who participated?

As the project focused upon the experiences of young people from different ethnic and religious minority groups, we prioritised an approach to the research that enabled access the **social worlds** of the young participants. We did this through focus groups and interviews that provided a confidential space for young people to talk about themselves, and explored their experiences in-depth with a member of the research team. In order to recruit young people to participate in the research, we contacted a range of community, statutory and religious organisations to help us to identify those willing and interested in taking part. A number of secondary schools, colleges, universities, youth groups, community groups, voluntary organisations, religious groups and places of worship were most helpful in identifying potential participants and setting up focus groups and interviews with young people. All of those who participated in the research freely consented to do so; we also obtained parental consent for those aged under 16 years. Where we quote directly from our participants, we have provided their age range and general location rather than using specific information that may make them identifiable to readers. We have used self-selected ethnicities and employed pseudonyms, many of which were chosen by the participants in order to protect their confidentiality. For this reason, the pseudonyms used do not necessarily correspond to the ethnic background or religious affiliation of the participants.

To address the research questions outlined in the introduction, we conducted research with six different cohorts of young people:

- Muslims;
- Non-Muslim South Asians;
- Asylum-seekers and refugees;
- International students;
- Central and Eastern European migrants; and
- White Scottish young people.

Overall, the team undertook 45 focus groups and 224 interviews with young people from across urban, suburban and rural Scotland. A total of 382 young people participated in the research (see Table 1), comprising 190 young women and 192 young men. The youngest participants were aged 12 years and the eldest 26. All focus groups and interviews were conducted in late 2013 and during 2014. All who participated were given a gift voucher as a token of our appreciation for giving up their time for the research, apart from those at one of the schools with which we worked, which preferred a donation to the school's hardship fund.

Table 1: Participants

Ethnic or religious group	Focus groups	Interviews	Number of participants
Muslim	12	45	100
Non-Muslim South Asian	8	51	81
Asylum seekers/refugees	2	28	37
International students		30	30
Central and Eastern European migrants	2	31	38
White Scottish	12	39	96
Focus groups with young people from mixed ethnic/ religious backgrounds	9		
Total	45	224	382

Young people participated in this project from across urban, suburban and rural Scotland, although the majority of them lived in urban and suburban areas:

- **Muslim young people** – There were 12 focus groups (4 each of Muslim men and Muslim women, and an additional four of mixed gender). The majority of these were in Glasgow or East Renfrewshire, with one in Fife. Some 45 Muslim young people were individually interviewed in a range of places including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, East Renfrewshire, Inverness, Dumfries and Fife.
- **Non-Muslim Black and minority ethnic young people** – There were 8 focus groups with non-Muslim South-Asian or Black young people; 4 of these were mixed gender, and a further 2 were of young men or women only. Also, 7 focus groups were undertaken in Glasgow and one in Edinburgh. Some 51 young people participated in individual interviews in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, East Renfrewshire, Dumfries, Fife and Inverness. Within this group, 17 young Sikhs were interviewed in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and East Kilbride.
- **Refugees and asylum-seekers** – There were 2 focus groups with young asylum seekers and refugees. One of these was men-only and the other was mixed. Both were in Glasgow. We conducted 28 interviews with asylum seekers or refugees, all of which were in Glasgow apart from one in Fife. Countries of origin of those who participated were Pakistan, Somalia, the United Arab Emirates, Syria and a number of other Asian and African nations.
- **Central and Eastern European migrants** – There were 2 focus groups were held with Central and Eastern European migrants, one with young women and one with young men, and both took place in Glasgow. Some 31 Central and Eastern European migrants participated in individual interviews in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness. This included interviews with young people born in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Ukraine.

- **International students** – A total of 30 international students participated in individual interviews in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Fife. There were 21 men and 9 women who participated in interviews, including 9 Muslims, 14 Christians, 3 young people of other South Asian religions and 2 affiliated to no religion.
- **White Scottish young people** – There were 12 focus groups, 6 of which had a mix of young men and young women. These took place in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Fife; and 39 White young people participated in individual interviews in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth, East Renfrewshire, Inverness, Dumfries and Fife.

In the focus groups, particularly those with younger participants, we adopted a participatory approach whereby we provided the young people with Post-it notes, pens and flipcharts. We encouraged them to think through their experiences in more depth, and photographs of some of the Post-it notes are included throughout this report. The purpose was to lead the young people to think through the ‘good and bad things about Scotland’, using the points they wrote as a way to generate a broader discussion amongst the group. With some groups we conducted a second exercise that explored, for example, the ‘good and bad things about being Muslim in Scotland’. These exercises were useful in enabling the views and experiences of the participants to come to the fore, and for the research team to adopt a grounded approach and be led by respondents to issues that they wanted to talk about.

For interviews, we used an interview schedule and adopted it to varying degrees, depending on the personal experiences, views and interests of each young interviewee. Some of the key topics explored in interviews included: everyday life; home and belonging; being a minority; the local community; life in the city/suburbs or countryside; Scottish politics; political events; and reflecting on your identity. All the focus groups and interviews were fully transcribed in order that key themes could be identified by the team for further analysis. In addition to these young people, we interviewed eleven stakeholders who work in different capacities with ethnic and religious minority young people. This report explores the key findings of this research about young people’s everyday geopolitics in Scotland.

Summary

- We adopted a qualitative approach and conducted 45 focus groups and 224 interviews to access the social worlds of the young participants;
- 382 young people participated in the research, comprising 190 young women and 192 young men; and

- 100 young Muslims, 81 non-Muslim South Asians, 37 asylum seekers and refugees, 30 international students, 39 Central and Eastern European migrants, and 96 White Scottish young people participated in this study.

Section 4: Politics and Participation



How do young people engage in politics? Do young people understand how to engage with politics and make their voices heard? How do young people feel about the Scottish Referendum 2014?

This research took place both before and after the Scottish Referendum. The majority of young people over 16 years of age who participated in the study beforehand indicated that they intended to vote and, of those who participated afterwards, the majority of those who were eligible said that they had voted. The lowering of the voting age to 16 years was taken as a signal that politicians were interested in the opinions and views of young people. The Independence Referendum was a catalyst for some young people to consider political issues. For example:

Campbell: I will be honest, like, before the, the Referendum I had absolutely no clue about anything to do with politics... April... then the Government were like yeah, okay, yeah we're going to give 16-year-olds a vote here. And then I think because I was given the opportunity to, have a really big say in, like, a huge decision for the country, so that really, you know, it kind of got my interest... (male, 16–18, White Scottish, no religion, Edinburgh)

Most participants received their information about the Referendum from mainstream media (print and broadcast), the Internet and various social media forums (Facebook, Twitter). Other sources of information included parents, siblings and wider family as well as peers. Schools were also cited by many as playing a role, providing a space for discussion and debate about the Referendum, and more generally about the reasons for or against independence.

The issues that young people were interested in were not dissimilar to those dominating many Referendum debates with the general public. The headline issues for participants were: the future of the economy and job security; membership of the European Union; continued access to free higher education; and whether or not a small nation could sustain itself. Many young people argued strongly that political changes should deliver for democracy. They did not find it incompatible to be both a proud Scot and to be part of the UK. There was an air of anticipation that another way was possible and the prospect of greater autonomy, whether via Devo-Max or independence, was exciting for many participants. For instance, at a focus group in suburban Glasgow, one respondent commented:

Well, self-determination for the people of Scotland... to be able to choose our own path, to be able to make Scotland better.

Young people discussed their **perceptions of government and politicians** and questioned the integrity and track record of those in power. There was recognition of a growing gap between Westminster and Scotland in terms of policy, for example on higher education and tuition fees, and immigration. At a focus group in Edinburgh, a respondent commented:

There is quite a big difference between England and Scotland and I think the fact that if we could control our own taxes then we could try and get people out of poverty, because we have got one in five people in poverty in Scotland, and that is way too many. So then we could help that and we could help immigration because at the moment like Westminster don't want that to happen. Whereas it should happen because the people coming to this country add value to it and bring like skills with them. So we need to encourage people to come.

Very few young people talked about membership of political parties, though some became more involved with campaigning during the Referendum, for example distributing 'Yes' or 'No' leaflets. On the whole, those interested in politics were keener to discuss key issues and becoming active via organisations that campaigned on human rights. For example:

Annie: I am not interested, I am not well aware of politics in the UK... because I don't think that the government actually does what they say they will. I think that Amnesty International, for instance, is an extremely good organisation. The UN have an online volunteering scheme and I helped them, like, build a website that is close to political. (female, 19–21, Indian, International student, Fife)

Some were inspired by other young people who had been **active in political issues**, such as the initiative by The Glasgow Girls whose campaign played an important part in the decision of the UK government to end the detention of children for immigration purposes. However, the excitement of being able to vote at 16 or having an awareness of social issues does not necessarily translate to being politically engaged. Those who were more engaged were influenced by family members who were already politically active or addressing issues that had involved them personally, such as being a minority or being affected by racism. Yasmin noted:

Yasmin: So we have been to Glasgow City Chambers, we have been to the Scottish Parliament, we spoke to other MPs and basically what they are trying to do for the ethnic and religious minority community. Because in terms of say work, it is like a fact that minority Ethnic and religious minority groups are being, are not being hired as much as

anybody else sort of thing and just sort of what they are doing tackle that or like add to racism. (female, 19–21, Scottish Indian, Sikh, Glasgow)

Young people were not always aware of how they might **influence change**. For example, Betty commented:

Betty: Actually I don't think I do know what channels I would go through if I wanted [to become active] like obviously you'd go to the Council but then I wouldn't know what to do after that point. (female, 22–25, British Bangladeshi Muslim, Edinburgh)

Our study found that young people had concerns about issues of justice and fairness. For a minority, becoming engaged in politics was a turn off:

Agnieszka: Because I don't interesting. It's too hard for me and when I think about politics I have headache. (female, 22–25, Polish, Catholic, Inverness)

However, young people overwhelmingly wanted to be involved and to have opportunities to determine and shape their future.

Summary

- Young people engaged in politics through various media platforms, but were not always clear on how to access politics and influence change. Their political engagement was often influenced by both parents and friends;
- Young people voiced mistrust of politicians and political parties, and recognised the policy differences between Scotland and Westminster;
- Although young people had low levels of membership of political parties, many were interested in issue-based politics (e.g. human rights); and
- Young people were politicised by the Independence Referendum and by the opening up of the vote to those aged 16 and 17.

Section 5: National Identity and Scottishness



What does Scottishness and being Scottish mean to young people? What issues might influence ethnic and religious minority young people from having a sense of belonging in Scotland? Are there particular places where people feel more or less Scottish? During the campaign for independence in Scotland, national identity and ‘Scottishness’ were at the forefront of public debate. Young people have complex and shifting identities, shaped by various political and personal contexts. Many young people talked about the stereotypical markers of Scottishness such as tartan, bagpipes and haggis as superficial symbols, and referred instead to cultural characteristics that they felt made Scotland unique, such as the accent, friendliness, attitude and values. This was especially seen in contrast to England, which was seen as a less welcoming place, ‘more posh’ and ‘money oriented’.

There was a **strong sense of Scottishness** among those born and brought up in Scotland, irrespective of their ethnic or religious identity and heritage. This was found across all of the locations where young people participated in the research, including Inverness, Dumfries and Fife as well as Scotland’s major cities. The majority of participants referred to Scotland as a ‘multicultural nation’ with a diverse range of citizens. This was particularly the case amongst White Scottish young people who held the belief that Scotland is an open and welcoming place for newcomers. However, for some ethnic and religious minority young people, Scottishness was equated with Whiteness. For example, as Renuka remarked:

Renuka: the way I speak and the way I act, I think is Scottish, but it is my skin colour... people think that I am not Scottish. (female, 16–18, Scottish Indian, Sikh, Glasgow)

In contrast, many second-generation young people expressed hybrid or transnational identities, drawing on their family’s heritage in order to disrupt homogenised versions of Scottishness (e.g. Saeed, Blain and Forbes, 1999). Consider this reflection:

Saeed: What makes me Scottish? I think being born in Scotland is the big factor and this is my country more than, not more than any other Scots, but it is just as equal to a White Scot, an Irish Scot, a Scot’s Asian Pakistani, Scot’s Asian Indian, a Scot’s African. And you know it’s... it’s those things that make me Scottish. (male, 22–25, Scottish Pakistani, Muslim, East Renfrewshire)

In most cases, the existence of parental heritage beyond Scotland did not seem to dilute pride in having a Scottish national identity.

Furthermore, while Scotland was seen as distinct and separate from England, many young people felt an overriding sense of **Britishness** as well as feeling Scottish. This was seen as more relevant to those who had been born in England, or with an English parent, and connections to particular places in England. Loyalty to Britain, rather than Scotland, also related to personal connections in the UK, for example with the British armed forces through participation in cadet corps. For other non-Scottish-born young people, the situation was different again. The majority of Central and Eastern European migrants and international students did not feel Scottish and strongly associated their national identity with their country of origin. This affected whether or not young people felt entitled to vote in the Scottish Referendum. For example:

Alicja: I felt it actually very unjust that we had the right to vote... I am only a resident here. (female, 22–25, Slovakian international student, Catholic, Edinburgh)

Whilst **national identity** was felt to be important to the majority of young people we talked to, they also recognised and expressed other intersections of identity that shaped their experiences of the nation and interactions within it. As Dave suggested:

Dave: I'm proud to be Scottish, but that doesn't define you. (male, 22–25, White Scottish, Christian, Perth and Kinross)

For example, faith and national identity formed a complex relationship for young people. Many described themselves as 'Scottish Muslim' or 'Scottish Sikh', as distinct identities that are different from that of their parents, and different from majority White Scottish identities. The distinction of these categories demonstrates the dual importance of faith and nation in many young people's minds (Hopkins, 2007):

Darvesh: I'm more Scottish than anything else. In terms of ethnic and cultural background I'm a Sikh, so that's, that's something I wish that could be recognised. (male, 22–25, Scottish Indian, Sikh, Aberdeen)

Young people reflected on the **spaces and places** in which they felt more or less Scottish. This varied for different groups. Many refugees and asylum seekers, for example, felt a strong sense of belonging in the city to which they had dispersed, since they felt safe in comparison to their home country. One reflected on the diffusion of Scottishness in particular urban contexts that cultivate a strong sense of place:

Celia: I feel Glaswegian more than I feel Scottish. (female, 22–25, Kurdish refugee, Glasgow)

Schools were viewed as fostering a sense of Scottishness through mixed peer group interactions and teacher interventions, although this varied from school to school, with private schools perceived to be more internationally focussed. Universities were also regarded as spaces that encouraged a more international outlook. While many appreciated the inclusiveness and multiculturalism fostered in some schools to help integrate and educate young people from international backgrounds, the global outlook and diversity of the university campus was seen as a safer space to express different faith and ethnic identities. Fiona spent her early childhood in India before moving to Scotland with her family:

Fiona: I don't feel out of place in Scotland but I don't think I necessarily kind of categorise myself as Scottish or Indian... I'd like to think one day I could be a global citizen but I know that's easier said than done.
(female, 22–25, British Indian, Hindu, Edinburgh)

The private spaces and intergenerational relationships of the **home** served to complicate national identities. Maalik lives with his mother, father and grandmother. He watches Pakistani television at home and speaks Urdu with his family and reflected:

Maalik I feel Scottish with my friends and, you know, the way we talk. Soon as I come back home, speaking in Urdu and you know it's like I'm back in Pakistan. (male, 16–18, Pakistani refugee, Muslim, Fife)

In many **public and institutional spaces** such as schools and the street, young people's experiences of racism and islamophobia influenced their sense of belonging and claims to Scottishness. Many ethnic and religious minority young people described being misrecognised as 'foreign' and subsequently felt excluded from the idea of Scottishness:

Shelina: They have said 'go back to your own country' and I'm like 'this is my country, I've been, I've been living here all my life'. (female, 22–25, British Bangladeshi, Muslim, Dundee)

Flynn also talked about his experiences:

Flynn: If someone asks me... like, where are you from. And I would say Scotland, and they would say no, but where are you really from... I'm like, I'm from Scotland. Aye, but where is your mum from. She's from Scotland. Ah, okay, so where's your dad from? Aye, he's Palestinian. They go ah, you're Palestinian, ah, I see. But I'm from Scotland. But, yeah, I would say I'm mixed between the both I would identify myself as a Scottish person. (male, 16–18, Scottish Palestinian, Muslim, Fife)

By contrast, some Central and East European migrants were misrecognised as Scottish due to their Whiteness, particularly those who had developed a Scottish accent. Justyna suggests that such an experience makes her 'feel Scottish':

Justyna: Well, some people they, when they treat you like you're one of them, that's what actually makes you feel like one of them. Like, that makes you feel Scottish when they speak to you like that, when they treat you like that. That's mostly it. The respect. (female, 16–18, Slovakian, Catholic, Glasgow)

We discuss the issue of misrecognition in more detail later in this report.

Summary

- The independence debate acted as a catalyst for young people to reflect on what it meant to them to be Scottish; many felt that Scotland was a 'fair society' that was 'diverse' and 'friendly';
- Young people affiliated themselves to Scotland and Scottishness, irrespective of their ethnic and religious heritage; however, experiences of racism in public spaces sometimes eroded this and made them feel excluded and alienated;
- Young people often pointed out that national identity is only one aspect of their identity, with faith, ethnicity and cultural heritage also being important. Many young people also reflected on their transnational and hybrid identities; and
- Young people talked about important locations that nurtured a sense of Scottishness, including urban areas and educational sites.

Section 6: Interactions and Encounters



What are the experiences of young people who migrate to Scotland? What opportunities or barriers face migrant young people settling in Scotland? What role do the media play in shaping societal views about ethnic and religious minority young people and migrants?

The vast majority of young people who participated in the research were positive about ethnic and religious diversity. Participants were positive about the idea of Scotland being a multicultural nation and claimed that they showed respect for different cultures and religions. There were also numerous cases where young people were part of strong inter-religious and multi-ethnic friendship groups. Some young people felt that Scotland was tolerant (and many argued it was more tolerant than England, especially for international students). In a focus group in Edinburgh, a participant commented proudly and positively how 'there are thirty-seven nationalities in the school', and a number of participants cited examples of positive interactions taking place between people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

That being said, there was some evidence of **segregation** of different ethnic and religious groups. In particular, young people from Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic tended to be singled out – especially in Glasgow – as a group less likely to engage with those outside of their community. Consider the views of Jeremy, Laura and Artur:

Jeremy: I guess there's lots of discouragement around the Slovakian groups. (male, 12–15, Roman Catholic, White English, Glasgow)

Laura: The Slovakian people have earned themselves like quite a bad reputation. (female, 12–15, no religion, White British, Glasgow)

Artur: The Romanians and Slovaks are, like, separate and they never go to anyone else. (male, 12–15, no religion, White, Glasgow)

In focus groups of young people of diverse backgrounds, such as from Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic, the girls' group noted that 'Scottish people think they are gypsies but they are not', and they felt that 'Scotland doesn't want to be with Slovaks'. The feeling was similar amongst the young men: as one participant noted: 'I am saying Scottish can be racist... they are racist. Not to them, but to us.'

There were also examples – from school, college or university – where participants felt that specific ethnic or religious groups kept separate and tended not to speak to others from different backgrounds. Muslims students were singled out as being more likely to stay separate from students of other or no faith backgrounds.

In addition to racism, there was evidence of **sexism and homophobia** among participants, as well as personal experiences of these forms of prejudice. Some young people claimed that boys were more likely to have multi-religious or multi-

ethnic friendship groups than girls, enabled by participation in sports such as football. Some participants voiced contempt for White working-class young people, referring to how they tend to hang around in groups, wear tracksuits and be part of the 'Nedy' category. Whilst this was partly motivated by their concern about the racism they experienced, it also worked to reinforce stereotypes about White working-class young people.

Across the interviews and focus groups, we identified a number of factors that worked to create segregation, resulting in some young people feeling more **isolated and disconnected** than they could have been otherwise. Some of the participants – particularly those who had migrated to Scotland – felt that they were more visible as a minority in Scotland than where they had moved from. As a result, they sometimes felt that they were more likely to be pointed out as different. Many of the Sikh participants felt that there was a lack of recognition of Sikhism in Scotland and, as a result of this, they were misunderstood and assumed to be Muslim (Hopkins, 2014). Some participants (including but not limited to those following Islam) voiced concern about the drinking culture at university and how their choice not to participate led to becoming dislocated from their peers. Some of the refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the Central and Eastern European migrants, were concerned about language issues and said that they struggled to be understood; others felt that it took some time to integrate, with one participant arguing that it can take six years. An issue that arose in a number of interviews was about the ways in which some participants experienced a general sense of **social distance** from others; this was often subtle, although sometimes blatant, and tended to be about people looking, glancing or indicating their disapproval using facial gestures or body language (Noble, 2005).

Although some of these points about inter-ethnic and inter-religious interactions are of concern, there were many examples of participants showing **resilience** in standing up to exclusion. For example, some participants mentioned the importance of interacting with others in order to promote understanding and generate dialogue across difference. Others, such as Niini, talked about challenging racism and standing up to inequality:

Niini: But I have people staring at me and that. But like if I got asked, I've been thinking to myself what would I say if I've been asked like 'why are you wearing this, it's not right?' I would say, 'why, why do you wear kilts?' It's like the same thing 'cause everybody's got a dress for their country. (male, 12–15, Black African, Muslim, Glasgow)

Summary

- Most young people were highly positive about diversity in Scotland and many engaged in inter-religious and multi-ethnic friendship groups at school and university;
- There was some evidence that specific religious and minority ethnic groups were more segregated than other young people. In Glasgow, young people tended to identify Slovakian, Romanian and Czech young people as the most isolated minority groups, and some participants felt that Muslim students were the most segregated at university; and
- There was evidence of sexism and homophobia amongst participants, as well as personal experiences of these forms of prejudice.

Section 7: Migration and Mobility



How do young people who have migrated to Scotland feel about growing up in Scottish society? What are the positive aspects of being a migrant and what are some of the challenges? What are young people's attitudes about immigration policies?

Young people in the study had very diverse experiences of **mobility**, ranging from the international migration to Scotland of students for a short period of time, to those born in Scotland of migrant parents or grandparents, as well as young people who have moved internally within Scotland or from other parts of the UK.

Young people's mobility led to various expressions of belonging, and multiple and shifting ideas about '**home**'. For those participants not born here, life in Scotland was frequently compared with life back home. For example, many Central and Eastern European migrants saw Scotland as providing better opportunities for work and study than their home countries. David reflects on the university system in Scotland compared to Romania:

David: I think corruption is still a major thing in Romania and this affects education, so it's not the same quality. (male, 22–25, Romanian international student, Christian, Edinburgh)

Some felt that their encounters with multicultural life in Scotland had opened their eyes to difference:

Alice: Here so many immigrants who are not bullied and who are actually given job opportunities and who are not judged. And it's just so normal. And also how is it normal to not be normal. (female, 16–18, no religion, British, Dumfries)

For some migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, Scotland was viewed as both safer and fairer than their home countries. Here, Aziz talks about growing up in Inverness compared to South Africa:

We know we're safe and secure, you know whereas in South Africa we would think, 'you know what I'm definitely not going out after 7 o'clock', you know. (male, 16–18, Indian South African, Muslim, Inverness)

Migration experiences depended on a range of factors, including duration of stay in Scotland, English language skills, access to spaces of integration and intercultural encounters. **Language** was seen to be a key barrier for new migrants. Most Central and Eastern European young migrants felt more easily integrated into Scotland than their parents, since they had already learnt English in their home country and found it easier to adapt. Piotr, a Polish migrant living in Inverness, explained the difference between his experience and his mother's when trying to find work locally:

Piotr: for her it was hard to get any job cause of the language barrier. For me it's different because I was learning English back in Poland, but for her it's a huge change. (male, 16-18, Polish, no religion, Inverness)

Second-generation migrants also discussed the challenges their parents continue to experience in meaningful communication with service providers such as health practitioners. This was seen as a barrier to accessing essential services, for example at the doctors:

Preet: Even now I still think there is a slight gap 'cause I still have to keep going to the doctor with her. I feel as if there should be translators like.... Like, she can communicate but it's just she can't say the precise problem. (female, 16-18, British Indian, Sikh, Edinburgh)

Rani referred to her feelings about using an interpreter at parent's evening at school:

Rani: I was always embarrassed about it...sometimes I'd feel like we can't mix in because of the language barrier. (female, 19-21, asylum seeker, Muslim, Glasgow)

Migration touched the lives of Scottish-born young people, particularly ethnic and religious minority youth. Many people referred to **intergenerational experiences** that affected their perception of life in Scotland. Some young people, particularly those of Indian and Pakistani heritage, referred to the 'old-school thinking' of their parent's generation, first-generation migrants to Scotland perceived to be stricter in terms of religious practice and the maintenance of cultural traditions. While some young people respected these differences, others rejected them and felt they were at odds with their own notions of faith, culture and 'modern' Scottish lifestyles. This was particularly noted with respect to parental expectations about the role of women in families and society. Also, first-generation migrants were seen to have experienced more racism than subsequent generations, due to the challenges associated with integrating and speaking English, particularly those who moved to the UK in the 1960s and 70s. Nabila reflects on her mother's experiences:

Nabila: I think she went through... a lot worse... whereas I have been in my own bubble so, not really met anyone really nasty... she has gone through... like being treated differently even in the supermarket and stuff. So I think she sees it a lot more cynically than I do. But she still prefers it, she still much prefers Britain to Libya.(female, 19-21, British Libyan, Muslim, Dundee)

These intergenerational experiences of racism led to family strategies to minimise potential experiences of racism in the younger generation, such as encouraging 'hard work' at school, as Andy from suburban Glasgow suggests:

they always say that because we're a minority we need to work harder and stuff like that because we're at a disadvantage. (male, 16–18, Chinese, other Christian, Glasgow)

Attitudes to immigration varied, but most young people felt that migration to Scotland had positive effects in terms of population growth and economic prosperity. There was widespread discomfort about the term 'immigrant' among both Scottish- and non-Scottish-born young people. For example, Mohammad reflected that:

Mohammed: I'm sort of fed up of living here just 'cause... like a lot of people are just like look at you and go 'immigrant' even though you're not, I was born here, I've lived here longer than a lot more people. But despite that some people are like, 'oh immigrant, yeah, look at him' (male, 16–18, Bangladeshi British, Muslim, Dundee)

The negative impact of the media on public perceptions of migration was clearly felt by most young people, with asylum seekers and Central and Eastern European migrants being repeatedly stereotyped as 'taking' jobs and benefits. The debates about immigration were seen by Azlan (male, 22–25, Pakistani British, Muslim, Dundee) to be 'verging on racism', normalising negative commentary on immigration in the public realm. Generic representations of 'immigrants' by media and politicians were felt to be misleading and 'lumping everyone together', rather than recognising the diversity of migration to Scotland. Some young people also reproduced these generic representations, associating immigrants with low wages and low-skilled work. Suri reflects on the impact of this discourse:

Suri: The discourse in general about immigration really upsets me, because it kind of treats people who are immigrants as lesser people. They treat people who have had to flee from their homeland, they trying to do whatever they can, in particular, I am thinking about the refugees here. As people who are like kind of parasites leeching on like the generosity of specifically Canada, US, UK, for example. (female, 19–21, Somali international student, Muslim, Fife)

Some felt that hard-line **immigration policies** had been created primarily to appease public anxiety over immigration, which was being bolstered by parties such as UKIP and the BNP. This led to some support for devolved powers over the management of migration in Scotland. Some ethnic and religious minority young people talked about being disproportionately stopped and searched at airport security and immigration, including those from outside the EU and British citizens bearing visible

markers of ethnic or religious identity. This led to a feeling of being ‘securitised’ that affected their sense of belonging in Scotland. For example:

Ananya: they let like a whole load of people go on and they’ll stop me and it’ll be like, ‘are you carrying drugs, are you carrying weapons’ and then they’ll check my bags and things like that. (female, 19–21, British Indian, no religion, Fife)

It was also felt that factors such as age, class background, educational level and geography contributed to people’s attitudes to immigration. For example, in rural areas migrants from Central and Eastern Europe were seen as the most marginalised group, experiencing discrimination in areas of high deprivation. Dave talked about the attitudes to Central and Eastern European migrants in Perth and Kinross:

a lot of people would just complain about them... And it really annoys me when people, where they ‘Oh, they’re taking our jobs’. They’re not. They’re just, who are you gonna employ – a hard worker or a lazy guy? It’s common sense. (male, 22–25, White Scottish, Christian, Perth and Kinross)

There was some uncertainty about **economic security** for young migrants who had aspirations to stay in Scotland, particularly among asylum seekers and international students. Many of the young asylum seekers and refugees we interviewed reflected on their memories of arriving in Scotland, and the complex and uncertain asylum process they had to negotiate. For some, this included regular ‘dawn raids’, a practice that brought back painful memories and left a perpetual feeling of uncertainty as to whether they were accepted in Scotland, impacting on their sense of belonging:

Rani: the most difficult part is the uncertainty, ‘are we going to stay here are we going together or be taken back’, you know that is the most difficult part. (female, 19–21, asylum seeker, Muslim, Glasgow)

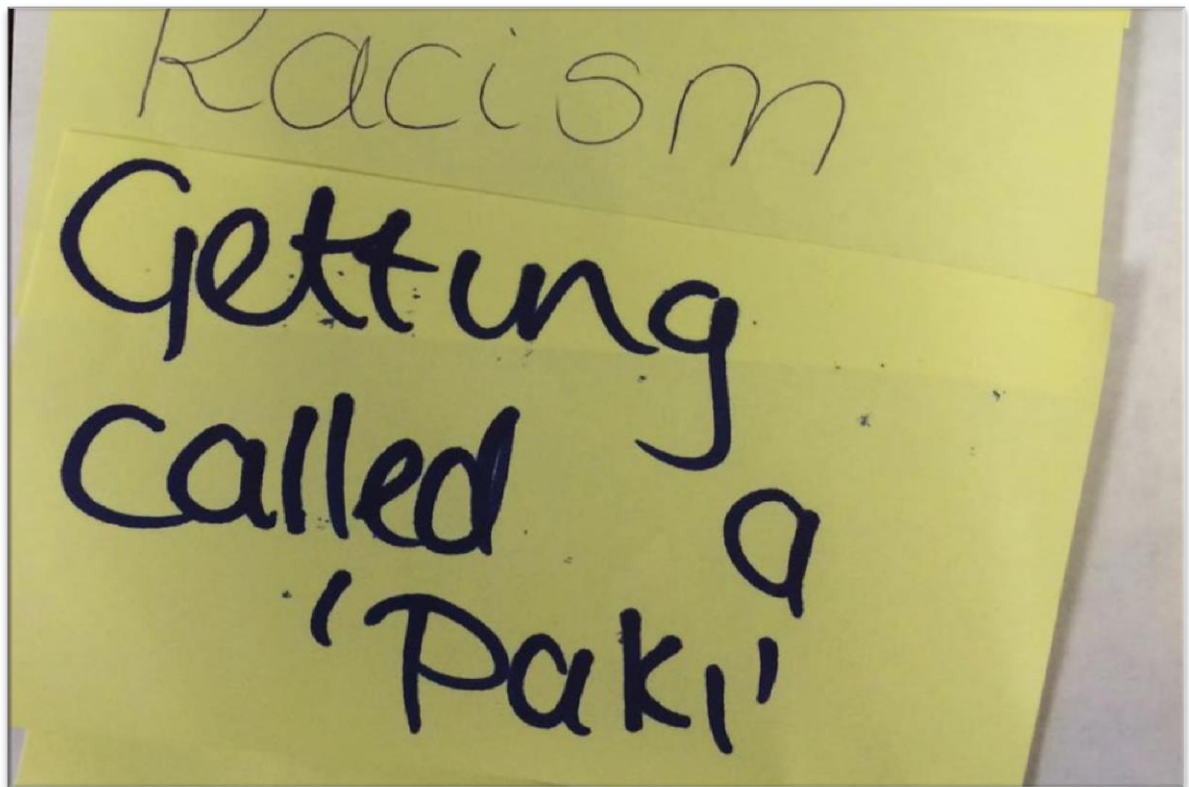
The inability to work in Scotland as an asylum seeker also led to feelings of disenfranchisement. In recalling her experience of asylum, Vaani reflected:

Vaani: the whole idea about not being able to work just made you feel like, ‘OK, I’m not part of this then, they don’t want me to work’... you just feel like a beggar rather than, you want to work, and pay taxes, and be part of the community. (female, 19–21, Pakistani refugee, Sikh, Glasgow)

Summary

- Young people's experiences of migration have led to multiple understandings of 'home';
- Language is a key barrier for migrant young people, including for their parent's generation;
- Migration heritages are important to young people's sense of identity and experience; and
- Many young people talked positively about immigration and supported pro-migration policies in Scotland, however they also recognise the negative impact of the media on immigration discourse, and have personal experience of 'securitisation'.

Section 8: Racism and Discrimination



How does racism manifest itself in young people's everyday lives in contemporary Scotland? Who are the perpetrators of racism? Where does it take place and what causes it? In what ways do young people identify, address and challenge racism? Most ethnic and religious minority young people in this study felt it was important to discuss racism. For example:

Sasha: I think it's good to talk about it 'cause people, lots of people, still pretend it's not there and, like, 'oh it doesn't exist, we're in 2014' but it does, it really does, so I think it's good to talk about it and for people to, like, know about experiences other people have had so they can learn from experience and example. (female, 16–18, British African, Christian, Glasgow)

There were complex articulations of racism, and young people described different ways in which they felt they were categorised, signified and set out as 'other', such as on the basis of accent, colour, faith, dress, nationality and ethnicity. These examples demonstrate that racism operates in multifarious ways and affects people differently, depending on age, gender and religious and/or ethnic background. Young people talked about racial slurs, such as 'Paki', persisting as an everyday racist shorthand, as well as **new expressions of racism** based on Islamophobia, anti-immigration attitudes and religious intolerance. Aisha talked about the complexities:

Aisha: I think that racism is much more precise in describing the type of hardships that young Muslims go through. Just because of the word Paki being a racial slur here... And the fact that it is a racial slur for people from the Indian subcontinent exemplifies that racist attitude, and it doesn't have to be Islamophobic at all. I mean people see Muslim, Hindu, everybody that looks a certain way, fits that category [of Paki]... (female, 22–25, Indian, Muslim, Highlands)

As Aisha suggests, the term 'Paki' is used towards people of South Asian heritage, irrespective of their national or faith identity. It extends to those of African heritage and a minority of young people from Central and Eastern Europe, demonstrating the arbitrary application of such racist language. As Jessica says:

Jessica: People, like, usually just 'cause I'm, like, just a bit more tanned they always, like, come out with things like you're Black, or Paki. But it just doesn't really bother me 'cause I know I'm White and, like, it's ridiculous, to be honest. (female, 16–18, Polish, Catholic, Highlands)

Young people differentiated between overt and covert racism, in different spaces and contexts. Most claimed that they had not directly experienced much overt racism and felt that, on the whole, Scotland was accepting of diversity, especially in comparison to England. Despite this, many people reflected on **everyday racist encounters** they had witnessed, as one participant reflects here:

Rani: Even like the restaurant today, there were a few customers who were being rude to the manager for his accent, they couldn't understand him 'cause he's Chinese so his accent they couldn't understand him.... There will always be, I feel, like, everybody you know, all minorities do experience racism now and then. (female, 19–21, asylum seeker, Muslim, Glasgow)

Adam, a White Scottish Muslim convert (male, 22–25, White Scottish, Muslim, Inverness) described a conversation he had with a taxi driver in Glasgow as an example of daily experiences of racism related to immigration. The taxi driver had commented:

Well, you open the papers nowadays and there's a murder or there's a rape or there's some sort of child abuse, it's always some long name that you can't pronounce, some sort of foreigner.

While examples such as this were commonly reported, more often ethnic and religious minority young people disclosed covert, subtle experiences of racism. For instance:

Derek: When I first came to the gym, I was the only Black person going into the room with about thirteen, fourteen, like, Scottish people. And when you get in there, you do feel apprehensive. You wonder what they are thinking about you, what's going through their mind... like, sometimes it's just the slightest expression, in most cases it's not the choice of words, it's the words they don't say that really counts. (male, 19–22, Ghanaian international student, Christian, Dundee)

These were complex encounters that made some young people feel insecure, anxious or out of place in certain situations. Others employed **personal strategies of resilience** to dismiss racism and prejudice, refusing to be stigmatised by false stereotypes based on misrecognition or ignorance:

Aziz: Their attitude towards you, 'cause you can tell by the voice of someone and by the look of them that they're either, you know, comfortable with you or uncomfortable with you. I mean, it's quite apparent if someone's comfortable with you face up and if someone's not comfortable with you face up (male, 16–18, Indian South African, Muslim, Inverness)

Despite an overall feeling that Scotland was less racist than England, it was seen there were particular spaces in which racism occurred more often. Public spaces were most commonly associated with racist encounters, such as in the street, particularly at night, and in city centres; parks and sports centres (gyms); and on public transport. **Alcohol and drugs** were seen as triggers for racist incidents. It was not

uncommon in areas of greater deprivation for visible minorities to be told to ‘get back to your country’ or face a racist attack. Young people discussed how targets of racism might vary according to context. For example, some talked about racism being more obvious in a football context, suggesting that in such instances it was often intertwined with sectarianism and the Catholic–Protestant divide, making it difficult to know what form of discrimination and bigotry was being manifested. There was, nevertheless, recognition that some groups were perhaps bearing the brunt of more racism than others, for instance the Roma community and those from particular Central and Eastern European countries associated with economic migration. The police response varied to racist incidents, and some young people spoke highly of community support officers as integral to community safety, while others expressed mistrust or a lack of faith in them responding appropriately or at all. This had led to some cases of non-reporting. Justyna talked about a lack of trust in police in a particular part of Glasgow:

Justyna: I don’t think you can actually trust the police around here, because whenever you give them a call, or we give them a wave that we need help, they either just suggest, they straight away think you are doing something wrong, or they just walk past and they don’t even care.
(female, 16–18, Slovakian, Catholic, Glasgow)

Schools and universities were viewed by most young people as safe spaces, particularly where equality and diversity infrastructures were strong and teachers were seen as supportive. However, young people had varying experiences. In schools, it was perceived that racist comments tended to occur at the primary and lower secondary ages. Many young people indicated that the racism they encountered at school was largely from teenagers, particularly young boys and men, although not exclusively. Our participants felt that once pupils reached upper secondary age they tended either to realise that to be discriminatory is wrong or learnt not to use racist language in public. The **link between racism and youth transitions** was variable, dependent on the proportion of ethnic and religious minority pupils in the school, the frequency of intercultural encounters and the depth of these interactions.

Universities were generally viewed as internationally focussed spaces with an emphasis on diversity and equality. However, some still felt out of place and expressed a desire to fit in by following certain norms. A young Muslim woman here describes her hesitancy to wear the headscarf in university settings:

Nadia: Just generally the way that people treat you I think that, and whether, whether you’d like be a victim of racial abuse. I think that’s one o’ the key considerations when you’re, when you’re, like, thinking about putting a headscarf on... I think it’s just ‘cause I’m at University and like I just, I just feel like it wouldn’t really fit in. (female, 19–22, Pakistani Scottish, Muslim, Dundee)

Some young people also had a perception that **institutional racism** penetrated a range of organisations. In terms of work, young people were concerned about barriers to fair treatment that could impact on them obtaining a job, being promoted or their overall achievement. Davey, an African refugee living in Glasgow, said:

Davey: I know people who've like been to University and because they are Africans and they don't get jobs. I don't know, I don't know why, some strange reason they just don't get jobs. (male, 19–22, African refugee, Christian, Glasgow)

It was acknowledged that within Scotland there were **place-based factors** that affected the frequency, nature and outcomes of racism. The size of community, level of policing, community relations and economic factors were all noted as important determinants of the type and degree of racism or intra-community conflict. The size of a community was perceived to be important in determining experience of, resistance to and recovery from racism. For example, some young people in bigger cities felt safer as part of a larger group. On the other hand, some felt that the collective weight of community was both positive and negative, with some suggesting that the visible presence of difference in the city could potentially be misinterpreted as a threat to the majority cultures. There are, however, many examples of individual responses that countered misrecognition and racism based on these factors, as discussed in the following section. Ethnic and religious minority young people living in rural areas described feeling more visibly different from the majority White Scottish community. For some, this generated potential for misrecognition and racism, while for others it was an opportunity to gain localised recognition and promote difference in a positive way. Nuzrat talks here about her strategy to anticipated hostility in public spaces:

Nuzrat: If people judge, soon as they kind of look at you, and I think even one smile. 'Okay, she is not that bad', ha ha. 'She is friendly!' that kind of thing.... I think there is responsibility for me to do that kind of thing. Because I think from learning from religion itself as well, from the teachings, I think, yeah. I think that kind of influences you to do it more, I guess (female, 19–21, Indian Scottish, Muslim, Inverness)

Strategies to resist racism depended on the encounter, geographical location, and intergenerational and peer group relations. While many young people were aware of daily undercurrents of racism, many dismissed prejudices and stereotypes as something that 'just happens'. They talked about having a personal orientation that enabled them to be resilient, linked to support and guidance from peers, intergenerational relations and teachers. For instance, some ethnic and religious minority young people made comparisons with their grandparents' generation, which they said did not report or talk about racism and relied on narratives of **social mobility** to

counter racism and discrimination. The approach was to accept the situation and to work harder to succeed, an ethic that had been passed down through generations:

Andy: Yep, they always say that because we're a minority, we need to work harder and stuff like that because we're at a disadvantage. They always say that to me. (male, 16–18, British Chinese, no religion, East Renfrewshire)

However, there were stories of violence and sustained racist abuse, directed not only at young people but to family members or the community. The use of racist banter in friendship groups was also discussed and, overall, young people felt that it was dangerous to dismiss everything as banter. For example:

Daniel: I hate that word. It's just, it's just an excuse for people to, to say things that aren't really acceptable and then, and then if someone gets offended just to be, like, well why are you getting annoyed, this is just, it's just banter. In the same way that people use the term political correctness now, as well. (male, 22–25, White Scottish, no religion, Edinburgh)

Despite this, many of our participants has developed sophisticated strategies to avoid, counteract or be resilient to racism expressed through a personal confidence in their identity. Ajay sums up the attitudes of many of the religious and minority ethnic people who took part in this study:

Ajay: I think if you're confident in how you look, or how you are as a person, none of this matters. Someone can be as racist as anything, we could walk out, someone could say something racist, and I'd be like, yeah, whatever. It wouldn't make a difference to me. (male, 22–25, British Indian, Sikh, Aberdeen)

In terms of the **causes of racism** in Scotland, young people discussed a combination of factors including the penetration of racist language across generations and communities; the impact and media coverage of political events, such as 9/11, 7/7 and Woolwich; and the everyday tensions within communities over spaces and resources, particularly in the context of new migration. Social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, were seen to capture scenes of everyday racism, evidencing racist encounters on the streets and displaying racist language in response to particular stories. Young people indicated that more needs to be done to educate young people on how everyday racism operates and how it should be responded to.

On the whole, in Scotland the **attitudes to immigration** were positive, though there was a feeling that public attitudes to Central and Eastern European migration were less accommodating and had led to racialised readings of economic migrants. Young people from rural areas, in particular, noted that the visible presence of new

migrants from Central and Eastern Europe generated racism and discrimination in communities. For instance:

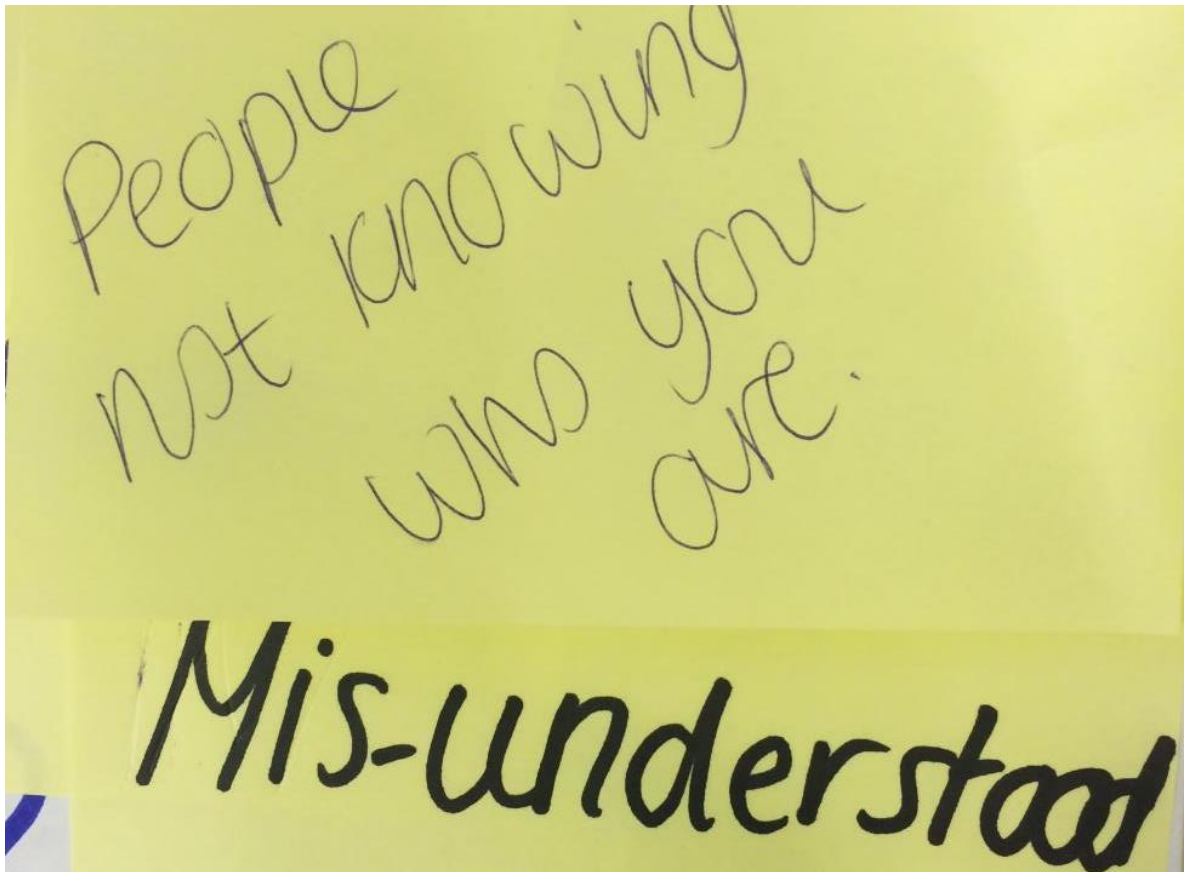
Clare: A lot of people, like, I would say are still quite close-minded to migrant workers and stuff like that about how they're coming and taking jobs and stuff like that.... And... I've just heard a lot a' people like calling them all, 'oh just the foreigners' in quite a derogatory way. So I think it's a shame, because they have just come here to find work. And they're taking the jobs that honestly nobody else in the area would want to do anyway. (female, 19–21, White British, no religion, Perth and Kinross)

The prevalence of these attitudes in some spaces indicates that White migrants experience racism as well as those from other ethnic and religious minority groups. For example, some young people from Poland, Slovakia and Romania reported incidences of racism in their school and local public spaces.

Summary

- Young people felt it is important to talk about racism and referred to racist incidences on the basis of accent, skin colour, faith, dress, nationality and ethnicity;
- Young people explained that racist incidents tended to be triggered by media stereotypes and people who were under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs;
- Young people understand that racism can be both covert and overt. Encountering and responding to racism was context-dependent, based on the intersection of place, community size, peer and intergenerational relations, and personal identities; and
- Many young people demonstrated resilience to everyday racism and felt able to manage and respond to it.

Section 9: Being Mistaken for a Muslim



Do ethnic and religious minority young people ever experience being mistaken for Muslims? Are particular ethnic and/or religious minority groups more likely to be taken for Muslim than others? How do young people manage and respond to these experiences? Alongside our exploration of young people's experiences of racism, we investigated the ways in which some of our participants were misrecognised or misidentified by others. In particular, we focussed upon the experiences of young people who were mistaken as Muslims or misrecognised as affiliated with Islam. Of our participants, non-Muslim South Asian young people were the most likely to be **mistaken for Muslims**. Some, but not all, of our participants from African or Caribbean backgrounds also discussed being misrecognised as Muslim. Finally, a small number of Central and Eastern European migrants recalled being taken as following the Islamic faith. As discussed earlier, across all three groups there were regular references to being referred to as 'Pakis' alongside assumptions that they were Muslim.

Amongst those participants with non-Muslim South Asian backgrounds, it was **Sikh young people** who most frequently discussed being mistaken for being Muslim. This was often explained as due to their skin colour, facial hair and wearing a turban. As Darvesh, a Sikh man in his early twenties from Aberdeen, said: 'It's 'cause I'm brown and I've, and I've, I've got a turban and a beard, you know'. Similarly, a Sikh participant in a focus group in Glasgow said, 'sometimes we get called Muslims'. Alongside their Sikh classmates, **Hindu students** also recalled being taken for Muslims. A participant in a focus group with Hindu school students in suburban Glasgow said 'most people mistake me for Muslim' and Aahna, from the same school, said during her interview:

Aahna: Uhm most of the time people think I'm Muslim. Ehm, but like nobody ever... It's not like they say it just because... they're not trying to stereotype they just don't know that much about Hinduism and stuff... sometimes it's like they'd say 'Happy Eid' and stuff, which I understand – it's quite nice. If they thought I was Muslim, that's fair enough. Like they were never trying to like hurt me or anything. It was always like just trying to be nice. (female, 16–18, Indian, Hindu, Glasgow)

In another example, Donald said:

Donald: Most people actually do [think I am Muslim]. Like, and our RE teacher once thought I was a Muslim because of my skin colour. Then, yeah and when I first came to this school some of my friends now were shocked that I was a Catholic. They thought I was Muslim as well. (male, 12–15, Scottish Indian, Catholic, East Renfrewshire)

Some ethnic and religious minority young people from non-Muslim backgrounds mentioned instances when they were taken for Muslims. Within this category were young people born and brought up in Scotland, others seeking asylum and yet others who were international students. One 16-year-old focus group participant in Glasgow, a Christian of African heritage, recalled a situation where she had to clarify that she was not Muslim: 'They will be, like, "Why are you not off for Eid?" I am not a Muslim!' In another example, Saanvi (female, 16–18, British Indian, no religion, Dundee) explained that she did not follow any religion, but was occasionally taken for Muslim. Similarly, Sabina (female, 19–22, Indian international student, Hindu, Fife) does not follow a particular religion but is loosely affiliated with Hinduism. She explained that people assumed she was Pakistani and therefore Muslim; this led to her being questioned about her culinary preferences and other cultural practices.

Most of our respondents from Central and Eastern Europe did not experience being taken as Muslim, as they felt that they were White and therefore unlikely to be seen as following the Islamic faith. However, there were some participants, particularly those from Slovakia, Romania or the Czech Republic, who argued that they were. For example, in a focus group with Slovakian young people in inner-city Glasgow, one member reported, 'Some people say I look Muslim because of the skin colour', and a second participant responded, 'Some of them because we look like Pakistani, we have got the same face, same skin colour'. These experiences of misrecognition connect with the ways in which these young people may be seen as being 'not-quite-White' (Nayak et al., 2006) and living in Govanhill (Glasgow), a neighbourhood traditionally associated with migrant communities and, most recently, with Pakistani Muslims.

The young people **responded to being misrecognised** as Muslim in diverse ways. Some claimed that they simply ignored such experiences, whilst others changed their behaviour in order to avoid being misrecognised. A number of young people sought to challenge those who misrecognised them by confirming their religious affiliation or through managing people's reactions to them in such a way to make it clear they were, for example, Sikh, Hindu or of no religion. Some of our participants also noted that people can change religion and move between different religious affiliations. A response – particularly by some Sikh participants – was to promote their religion actively in response to what they felt was the lack of understanding that had led them being taken for being Muslim.

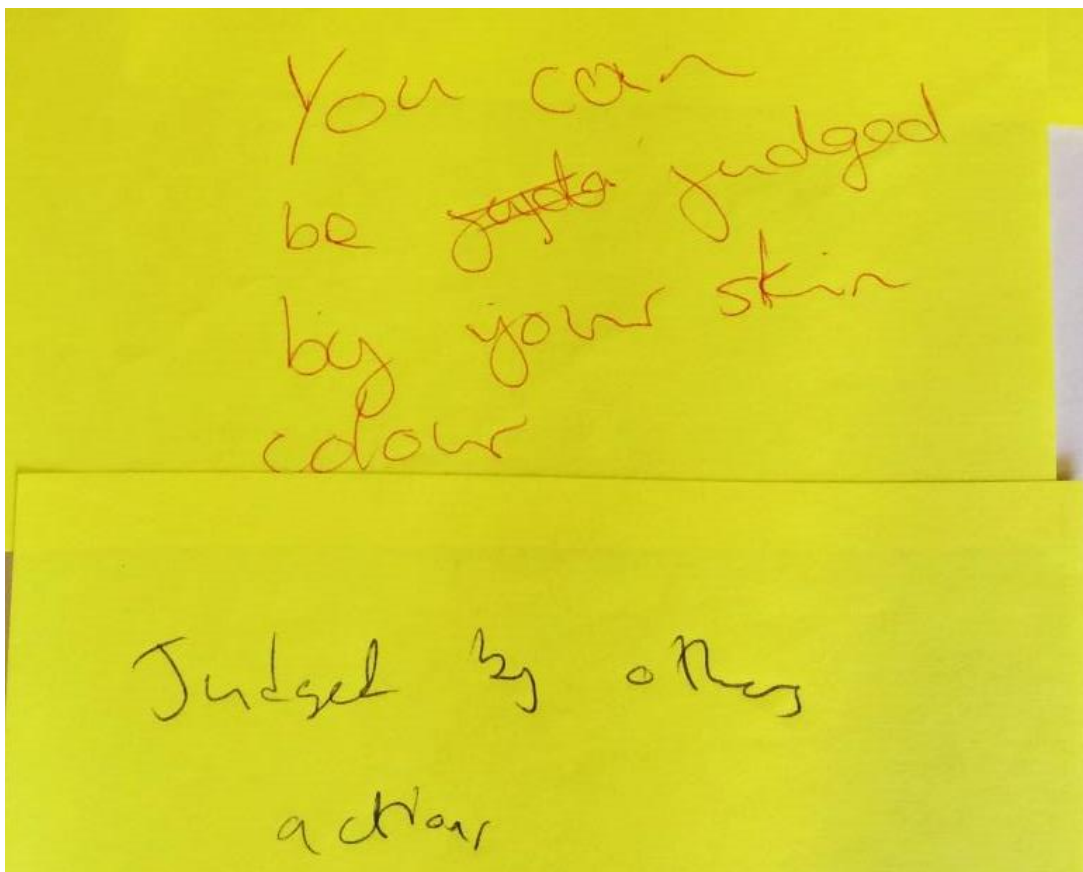
When we asked our participants to explain possible reasons behind their being taken for Muslim, one of the most common responses was **problematic news coverage about terrorism** that acts to stigmatise ethnic and religious minority young people. A number of our participants also felt that the 'Asian' community was homogenised to the extent that people problematically assume that all 'Asians' are Muslims. Related to this, some pointed out that Muslims are the largest minority group; as a result, they argued it was understandable that people might assume

they were Muslim. Some of the young Sikhs who participated felt that the Sikh community could be more active in promoting itself and educating people about Sikhism. Finally, the young people often mentioned a lack of education and understanding of different faiths as an explanation of their experiences of being misrecognised; connected to this, some pointed out that their experiences of racist misrecognition tended to be amongst younger children (for example, of primary school age), and it fell off as the children entered their late teens and early twenties.

Summary

- Young people from non-Muslim South Asia, Africa, and some Central and Eastern European countries experienced being taken as Muslim
- Young people with South Asian heritage were most commonly misrecognised as Muslim (Sikh, Hindu, non-religious Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi). They claimed this was the result of their skin colour, hair style and facial features, leading people to assume that they followed the Islamic faith;
- Young people explained that negative media representation, homogenisation of the 'Asian' community, the small size of some ethnic and religious minority communities and low levels of public awareness of religions were why they were sometimes mistaken for Muslims.

Section 10: Islamophobia



What is ‘Islamophobia’? How do young people living in Scotland understand the term? What are some of the challenges with using it? This project initially set out to explore how Islamophobia is understood by and impacts on the everyday lives of young people from different ethnic and religious minority backgrounds, who may or may not be Muslim. This is particularly important at a time when political events, along with media representation, are constructing Islam and Muslims as ‘dangerous’, ‘terrorists’, ‘the enemies within’ and the ‘ultimate Other’. Since the 1990s, the term has become increasingly popular and the Runnymede Trust provides this definition:

unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practice and consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs. (1997: 4)

The term is deployed widely in academic, political, policy and media circles, yet what it means and its implications for Muslims and non-Muslims remain deeply contested. It was coined to capture and challenge an increasing anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain. It was about ‘naming’ a ‘new reality’ and creating a ‘watershed in the relationship between the British establishment and Islam’ (Q News, cited in Allen, 2010: 55). Subsequent debates have focused on: whether or not the term reflects the diversity of Muslim experiences and practices, and the ways in which it essentialises Muslims and British/global Islam (Allen, 2010); what ‘phobic’ refers to in the term (Halliday, 1999); and the difficulties in decoupling race and religion, and whether the term reflects ‘new racism’ (Barker, 1981).

Generally, all the young people who participated in the research acknowledged that they had either directly or indirectly experienced **anti-Muslim sentiment** or were aware of it. A number of issues arose with reference to debate about Islamophobia and racism; these are explored in this section. Some of the young people explained how they were confused about what the term Islamophobia means and how it is used, as the term is poorly explained yet widely used by the media, politicians and policy makers. Most participants, both Muslim and non-Muslim, preferred the term ‘racism’, and one respondent in an all-male Muslim focus group in Glasgow described it as ‘a stupid word’. Others in the same group talked about how the term had particular negative connotations and that ‘It is saying something that is not really true, because there is no such thing as that [Islamophobia]’. Another respondent tried to demonstrate the absurdity of the term by suggesting that equivalents would be ‘Jewphobia’ and ‘Hinduphobia’. For Muslim young people, it was unclear whether highlighting the discrimination and prejudice they experience

through using the term Islamophobia was meant to help or hinder them. ‘Racism’ and ‘Islamophobia’ were frequently used interchangeably. There was also a concern about how the term Islamophobia singles out Muslims and Islam and, therefore, reifies particular stereotypes concerned with the idea that Muslims are ‘special people’ who need a specific term to address their marginalisation and to claim exceptionality (i.e. exception to British law and ways of life) whenever possible. For example, Nuzrat stated:

Nuzrat: I wouldn’t think it was a useful word, no.

Indeed, as mentioned above, she went to state:

I think it is a negative word, and I that kind of maybe... shapes the way people view the religion as well; because it is a negative word, maybe it is a negative religion and it has negative aspect to it.
(female, 16–18, Bangladeshi Muslim, Inverness)

Examples of exceptionality include, *inter alia*, calls for the introduction of Sharia law in the UK, the wearing of the *hijab* in schools and mosque-building projects in the face of local opposition. Some young people worried that such claims of exceptionality often led to further resentment towards Muslims.

Along with this, Islamophobia **homogenises Muslim experience** rather than representing the diversity of what it means to be a Muslim. For example, in our study we talked to members of the Ahmadyyan Muslim community, a sect of Islam that has endured opposition and persecution from many mainstream Muslims, particularly in Islamic countries. We found that Ahmadyyans in Scotland also face discrimination from mainstream Muslim communities. Indeed, there was concern that the term ‘Islamophobia’ trivialises and sanitises individual experiences of what it is to be a Muslim. Rather than being able to define their own histories, realities and identities, their histories are ascribed to them through traditional stereotypes about what it means; the discourse accentuates and feeds into such processes of othering. For non-Muslims, the term fails to capture the anti-Muslim sentiment that they may experience because they are perceived or ‘misrecognised’ as Muslim, and it is because of this that many young people prefer the term racism to Islamophobia. It emerged that ‘all brown faces’ (e.g. Sikhs, Hindus and Christian Arabs) are affected by Islamophobia. This can prove to be divisive in already fraught inter-community relationships, creating further cleavages between minority groups. In addition, it may prove to be particularly difficult for the anti-racist movement to counter.

The **media** play a central role in reproducing particular stereotypes and negative reporting about Muslims that, in turn, contribute to Islamophobia. Many young people talked about the bias in print and electronic media against Muslims; they spoke about how Muslims were often referred to problematically as ‘extremists’, ‘to

be feared', threats to British ways of life and 'the fifth column'. Young people argued that these images and commentary were overly simplistic and headline-grabbing. Little attention was given to the implications that these stereotypes have for ethnic and religious minority communities. In discussing the impact of the media, one young Muslim male in a mixed focus group of Muslims in suburban Glasgow spoke about:

the way they [the media] go about telling about terrorism isn't really quite a good way, because mostly they just tell the name of a terrorist and it sounds like a Muslim name and Asian name and that [is] what brings about the [negative] stereotype.

Another in a focus group of Muslim boys aged 12–15 in Glasgow discussed how the media constructs particular images:

'Muslim terrorist': ...because you do get... [the] terrorist image as a guy with a beard and turban kind of thing, and when you see someone here [in Scotland] that is the same, kind of dressed like [in] the same [way], they [the public] will think 'Oh, terrorist'. (male, Muslim, 12–15, Glasgow)

In discussing how Muslims are constructed in the media, particularly in relation to extremists from other religions, a Muslim woman in a focus group remarked, 'you get extremists in all religions, but yet when it comes to Islam it is kind of blown out of proportion, sometimes'. More often than not, a prime arena in which many of these reports and headlines are then shared and exchanged is that of **social media**, where anti-Muslim sentiments are aired openly and often anonymously. Whilst many of the participants talked about the media's negative impact, Preet (female, 16–18, Sikh, Indian, Edinburgh) talked about how it can also be used to challenge many of the stereotypes about Muslims, in positive advertisements about Muslims that could be aired on television, for example.

Our participants also reflected on the ways in which Islamophobia is **gendered**. Young women who choose to wear the *hijab* or *niqab* often are more readily subjected to abuse or taunts because they wear the more visible markers of being Muslim. In one case, Rani, a student, discussed how, on a bus in Glasgow, her *hijab* was pulled off:

Rani: I was on the bus with my friend, we were just sitting on the very back seats and there were three Scottish teenagers [i.e. White], two girls and one guy and they were all drunk... first they just started with the you know name-calling... I kind of ignored it... but then the girl pulled my scarf off and she's like, 'why do you wear this', you know 'are you trying to hide your nits or something...', then she pulled my hair. (female, 19–21, asylum seeker, Muslim, Glasgow)

When the incident was reported to the police, she felt that her concerns were not taken seriously as the attackers were not apprehended. A number of similar attacks against young Muslim women were recalled in this study, and how Muslim men were subjected to verbal and physical abuse.

Anti-Muslim attacks are informed by discourses, policies and practices at multiple levels – including **global, national and local** – and influence Muslim and non-Muslim people's everyday lives. Importantly, young people outlined that, whilst anti-Muslim incidences were increasing in Scotland, they were not as serious and problematic as they perceived to occur in England. This proved to be particularly salient for a number of the participants. A young Pakistani Muslim man in a focus group said:

for example, when the 9/11 happened, there was a lot of racist attacks that happened then, especially in England, and then it was coming up towards Scotland but it wasn't that severe.

With respect to the attempted Glasgow airport bombing, the same respondent replied:

nothing happened after that... I mean... it was in the paper and stuff, but nothing was there to say that it was yous [Muslims] who did it.

A Muslim women respondent talked about how she and her family had faced far worse racism when they lived in Manchester (e.g. she had rocks thrown at her), and how this had never happened in Glasgow.

Summary

- Young Muslims questioned the usefulness of the term 'Islamophobia'. The term is seen to be 'othering', reinforcing difference, which in turn further marginalises Muslims;
- Young people preferred the term 'racism' to 'Islamophobia'. The media, including social media, are catalysts of anti-Muslim sentiment; and
- If Islamophobia is defined narrowly as anti-Muslim sentiment, there are clear incidences of discrimination and prejudice against Muslims, which is often gendered and determined by where people live.

Section 11: References

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As the analysis for this project continues, we will add academic papers and other outputs to our project website: <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/youngpeople/>